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ABSTRACT

The Liberal Studies Assessment Portfolio program was instituted at San Diego State University in July 1992 in response to California's requirement that prospective elementary school teachers demonstrate subject matter competency. Since many liberal studies majors transfer to San Diego State University at the beginning of their junior year, most of the portfolio samples are selected from courses in the upper division major. Portfolios must be completed by the beginning of the fifth week of the semester during which the student intends to graduate. The first part of the portfolio allows students to describe their background, explain why they chose a given specialization, and evaluate the major and the portfolio process. The main body of the portfolio includes 15 writing samples selected from courses in seven major subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, social science, arts and humanities, physical education, and human growth and development. Students are allowed to include up to nine free-choice, optional entries. Students are also required to write four "connection" essays which are not done as part of a class. Students who have completed portfolios demonstrate that they can synthesize what they have learned and apply it to new situations. (RS)

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The San Diego State University Liberal Studies Assessment Portfolio

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Background

The Liberal Studies Assessment Portfolio program was instituted at San Diego State University in July 1992 in response to Standard 12 of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing which requires that individuals intending to teach at the elementary level demonstrate subject matter competency. A portfolio seemed the best mechanism for verifying competency because no two Liberal Studies majors take exactly the same coursework.

Transfer Students

Since many liberal studies majors transfer to San Diego State University at the beginning of their junior year, most of the portfolio samples are selected from courses in the upper division major. Advising worksheets which are available both at San Diego State University and at most of the community colleges in southern California alert students to the portfolio requirement when they first declare the liberal studies major. These advising sheets warn them to save one or more papers from their beginning composition class and their unit/lesson plan from their physical education of children class. During the last semester of their sophomore year or

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the first semester of their junior year, liberal studies majors take a course at San Diego State University which introduces them to the upper division major. At this point, they receive their official introduction to the portfolio process and practice writing the various types of entries. During their junior and senior years, they are encouraged to attend workshops sponsored by the university advising center. The portfolio must be completed by the beginning of the fifth week of the semester during which the student intends to graduate. The portfolio is submitted to the university Test Office which collects the fee that pays for readers. Different selected parts are read by two different readers. Portfolios are judged either Commendable, Satisfactory or Needs Improvement. If a portfolio needs improvement, the student has two months to make the necessary changes. If the student is especially weak in one area, additional coursework may be required.

Detailed Explanation

The portfolio consists of two major parts: "Who You Are" and "What You Have Learned." The first part allows students to describe their background, explain why they chose a given specialization, and evaluate the major and the portfolio process. In the introduction, they include an advising worksheet which show how and where they satisfied each requirement and the grade they earned. This worksheet is followed by a personal history and a resume listing their experiences working with children or serving as a leader. The specialization section allows them to explain why they specialized in a given subject area. The specialization consists of 12 upper division units concentrated in an area which they

ultimately will teach or in an area such as psychology which will help them work with children. One of the first two students specialized in geography because she had been a purser on several ships in the Hawaiian Islands and had taken a semester at sea program. She included a fascinating array of pictures as her specialization sample.

The main body of the portfolio includes 15 samples selected from coursed in the seven major subject areas: Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Arts and Humanities, Physical Education, and Human Growth and Development. In five cases, a specific sample from a specific course is required. In the remaining cases, students have some flexibility in choosing the sample. Each sample is introduced by a reflections page. In cases where there is no uniform sample such as science, the reflections page must include two to three pages of analysis. In most cases, however, the reflection is a short statement which allows the student to communicate with the reader, for example, to explain how he or she might have improved the paper, how the subject fit into the theme of the course, and/or how the project contributed to the student becoming a liberally educated person.

Exceptions

Sometimes students have done projects which they would like to include, but which don't fit into any of the required categories or they have had experiences that they would like to share. Students are allowed to include up to nine free choice, optional entries provided they include some kind of entry (not necessarily a written

sample) and an explanation page which tells the significance of the entry and why it is included under a given subject area.

In addition to the samples and free choice entries, the student is required to write four connections essays. These are not done as a part of a class since they are the test part of the portfolio. The first connections essay must deal with a national or world issue. Sometimes it can be based upon a project which was done for a class, for example, a paper on an environmental problem. The second and most challenging connections essay requires students to draw connections between two of the subject matter areas which they have studied, for example, the history of mathematics or the methods used in gaining knowledge in the social sciences as compared to the sciences. The third connections essay asks students to reflect upon their own experiences learning a given subject and to think about why they learned a lot in certain courses but not in others. The final connections essay allows students to think about how they would adapt something they learned to the elementary classroom. For example, could a study of the Civil War be taught through a dramatization of certain events?

Benefits for the Students

The students who have completed portfolios demonstrated that they can synthesize what they have learned and apply it to new situations. Even though they found the process time consuming and demanding, they are proud of their accomplishment.